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Subject: Dave's Somewhat Odd Capsules for April 2020

Posted by [dvandom](#) on Thu, 30 Apr 2020 00:47:27 GMT

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Dave's Comicbook Capsules Et Cetera

Intermittent Picks and Pans of Comics and Related Media

Standard Disclaimers: Please set appropriate followups. Recommendation does not factor in price. Not all books will have arrived in your area this month.

An archive can be found on my homepage, <http://www.eyrie.org/~dvandom/Rants>

This is a weird installment, since Diamond didn't ship anything in April, but a few companies decided to jump the gun and work around Diamond. For my part, I mostly bought stuff online, so a lot of these reviews are for older material that's just new to me. The Scout Comics and TKO materials below were bought through their programs of providing half the proceeds of online sales to the buyer's regular store. Black Mask is also in on it, and I did find something of theirs to try, but late enough in the month that it won't arrive until May (ordered a hardcopy).

Items of Note (strongly recommended or otherwise worthy): Nothing this month, but Immortal War is notably bad.

In this installment: Immortal Wars (DVD), Howard Lovecraft and the Undersea Kingdom (Blu-Ray), Princess Revolution, Little Guardians Book 1 and 2, Liberty Brigade Sourcebook, Gladstone's School for World Conquerors vol 1-3, The Fearsome Doctor Fang TPB, Sentient TPB, Kid Nefarious one-shot.

Current Wait List (books either Diamond didn't ship or my store failed to order): I ordered DC's Anti/Hero and Black Mask's Jade Street Protective Society late in the month, and they won't arrive until May. No Diamond shipments at all this month, and my store didn't go in for DC's last week of the month shipment thing (not that it had anything I was interested in).

"Other Media" Capsules:

Things that are comics-related but not necessarily comics (i.e. comics-based movies like Iron Man or Hulk), or that aren't going to be available via comic shops (like comic pack-ins with DVDs) will go in this section when I have any to mention. They may not be as timely as comic reviews, especially if I decide to review novels that take me a week or two (or ten) to get around to.

Immortal Wars: Carcass Studios - It claimed to be based on a comic book. Well...sort of. It's based on a webcomic that the director did in college, and they did self-publish a few physical comics as promotion for this direct to video movie that came out in 2017. I picked it up for \$3 at Big Lots.

Wow, this was bad. I mean, I was expecting bad, but this was boringly bad. Not even the "superhuman deathmatch" scenes were interesting...most of them involved one or two ineffective uses of CG special effect powers, then devolved into CW-level martial arts fights with occasional glowing hands. Even the ranged power experts only got off a single inconclusive blast before mixing it up hand-to-hand. The movie ends at the start of the final fight, To Be Continued in another movie in a few years, yawn. And the fights were the best part of the movie. There was a plot involving Eric Roberts as a sort of "Richard Dawson in The Running Man" fight promoter (and yes, a lot about this movie is like a cheaper version of The Running Man, only with inborn powers rather than gimmick suits) effectively ruling the post-disaster ruins of the world, and some of the fighters in the tournament trying to overthrow him, and I think one of the guards was in on it because he attacked another guard near the end, but it was all so poorly lit, poorly written, and poorly acted that I really couldn't say for sure. Not even worth watching to mock, MST3K would be hard-pressed to make it entertaining. Avoid.

Howard Lovecraft and the Undersea Kingdom: Shout/Arcana Studios - Another cheapo Big Lots purchase, this one really is based on a comic. A sort of guidebook to the series was Arcana's offering for Halloweenfest 2018. I got a Blu-Ray, but maybe this would work better on VHS...the animation quality is really poor. Like, some scenes are not up to the "Beast Wars Season 1" standards, and this came out 20 years after Beast Wars S1. The sound editing has issues as well...whenever someone off-screen is talking, it gets super loud and echoey. I almost gave up on it entirely, but then Mark Hamill's character Dr. Armitage showed up and at least he was worth listening to (the comic's writer voices not-Cthulhu and is not that great). Also, because it's a Mythos movie, Jeffrey Combs is in it, voicing Abdul Alhazred, who wants to assemble the Necronomicon, turn Howard's friend from kindly giant squidman into Cthulhu the Destroyer, etc. I'm told it's a reasonably faithful adaptation of the comic, but it does not inspire me to seek out the comics. Or the other two movies. At least it was mostly watchable, but that's not much of a recommendation.

#### Digital Content:

Unless I find a really compelling reason to do so (such as a lack of regular comics), I won't be turning this into a webcomic review column. Rather, stuff in this section will generally be full books available for reading online or for download, usually for pay.

Princess Revolution: Scout Comics - I reviewed the first chapter of this a while back, it was part of their "Binge" gimmick where you could buy the first chapter at full price, and then buy a trade paperback later to get the whole story. The ebook version of the whole thing ended up being only slightly more expensive than the one issue I bought. It's just as well that this was not released as a traditional monthly, because while the pacing

works for a "read in one sitting" trade, it's horrible for a monthly. There's three princesses whose fiancées are kidnapped by evil queens, and each of the first three chapters involves a different princess having a regular day with their beloved, and then the kidnapping happens and the princess sets out on the rescue mission. Reading three prologues a month apart would kinda suck. The fourth chapter has them meet and do the Marvel "fight then team up" plot, and the fifth and final one is princesses versus queens. As a complete story it works pretty well, even if it's slow to start and pretty quick to wrap up. Writer/Artist Elaine Tipping has the manga art styling down pat, but her writing craft needs polishing. Mildly recommended. \$5.99 at Scoutcomics.com

Little Guardians Book 1 and 2: Scout Comics - This is a book that I was moderately intrigued by when it was first announced, but not enough to order just from a solicit. But with two volumes out as online trades, I decided to try the first one and then decide whether to get the second one (which I did). The core premise is the "what if the Heroic Destiny was dumped on the wrong baby?" subversion of the Hero's Journey trope...not used too often, but I've seen it before. The moment of crisis is approaching, and the Real Hero has to step up and break out of society's expectations, etc. Unfortunately, the tone is a bit of a mess. It feels like a D&D session in which no one, not even the DM, can resist dropping anachronisms and gags into what's otherwise a serious story. This kind of mix of serious and silly can work, but...not that well yet in this case. Both the writer Ed Cho and the artist Lee Cherolis are guilty of this sort of mood derailment. (My enjoyment of the first book was a bit impaired by numerous file errors where most of a page didn't actually scan, but they were quick to fix things once I pointed out the pages. Scout does not work with ComiXology, and their in-house e-comic people are having to deal with all the learning curves.) I certainly wouldn't recommend spending the money for hardcopies of these, but the electronic trades are priced low enough to overlook some rough patches in the creative process. Mildly recommended. \$6.99 each at Scoutcomics.com.

Liberty Brigade Sourcebook: Thrilling Nostalgia Comics - I got this as part of a Kickstarter campaign, the main output of which is to be a 100-page comic done by a bunch of Big Names in comics, and using a lot of 1940s and 50s public domain superheroes (some overlap with Dynamite's roster, for instance) plus a couple of new patriotic heroes. This guidebook focuses on 20 characters (plus some sidekicks and supporting cast mentioned in the entries) in a format that's very similar to the one used in Heroes of the Golden Age (see my review of that in December 2019)...for good reason, as they worked with the HofGA people on this project, and used a bunch of Chris Malgram's art from HotGA. The editing is rather better than in HotGA, and since this is in service of a new comic there's some updates based on how the characters are being used in Liberty Brigade. Rather than just slapping a slight costume update on some of the characters as usually happens in projects with the public domain superheroes, some of them are getting significant changes or even replacements (the identity of K the Unknown is

taken up by someone else, a recurring villain from 1944 comics reforms and takes on a new heroic identity, etc). As with HotGA, the entries are long on art and short on information, so it's more of a source of inspiration than a research tome along the lines of a Jess Nevins or Jeff Rovin work. Still, if it becomes available separately later, it's worth a look.

Trades:

Trade paperbacks, collections, graphic novels, pocket manga, whatever. If it's bigger than a "floppy" it goes here.

Gladstone's School for World for World Conquerors vol 1-3: Maneki Neko Books - This was almost a Digital Content review, since Maneki's contribution to the plague times was to offer a free e-book of volume 1 to anyone who goes to gladstonesschool.com and signs up for their newsletter. But I liked it enough to pick up the slipcase hardcover set of all three volumes to date. The high concept is that a while back, things got really bad in a Silver Age-y sort of superhero universe that the heroes and villains called a truce, the nature of which made it safe for the villains to send their kids to a school started by the eponymous Gladstone but soon after taken over by the setting's Doctor Doom type. The story mostly follows a group of supervillain legacy kids as they learn to be world conquerors, taking courses in combat, tactics, unethics, etc. In the first volume, the kids discover how badly some of their parents come off in popular media, and decide to take down the hero who's always beating the older generation...at which point they find out the truth of the Truce and accidentally maybe kinda doom the world. (Two of them already knew the truth, and are plotting to blow the truce to pieces because their mother is in prison solely for refusing to abide by the truce. But it's hard to tell when they're deliberately sabotaging things and just being knuckleheads, because they are very much knuckleheads and one has an anti-tank weapon.) The other two volumes to date involve the kids discovering how badly they screwed up and trying to fix things without admitting to their parents what they did. They may be intent on global scale villainy, but none of them want their parents angry at them. (With good reason...as powerful as these kids are, their parents are stronger.) There's a single writer but rotating art teams, fortunately the artist in volume 2 is good at keeping people on-model. While there's definitely aspects of the setting that beg for further explanation that we're not likely to get (mostly revolving around "how do the villains actually benefit when the terms of the truce seem to massively favor the heroes?" issues), it's a pretty good Evil Boarding School Adventures stuff. Volume 3 ends with much of the Looming Doom plot left unshown, and it was published in 2018, but the company is still around and promoting it, so I guess we just get to wait for vol 4. The production values of this set are very good, with a sturdy slipcase for the three hardcovers, and bookmark ribbons in each volume. The individual volumes are listed as \$24.99 on the back, but the set as a whole is \$59.99. Recommended.

The Fearsome Doctor Fang: TKO - This is basically Fu Manchu with more modern sensibilities. Doctor Fang is the Fu Manchu stand-in, a brilliant inventor who has set out to save the world while convincing everyone he's trying to conquer it. Sir Denis Nayland Smith is replaced by Nayland Kelly, a San Francisco beat cop obsessed with the villainous Doctor Fang after his brother was apparently killed by the fiend from the East. If the third member of the protagonist cast is based on someone from the Rohmer stories, it's not obvious to me, but the treasure hunter Alice LeCroix does fit well into a fairly standard role in neo-Pulp stories. (Maybe she's inspired by Fah Lo Suee, Fu Manchu's daughter? Not too important, since this isn't trying to be a beat-for-beat updating of any particular Fu Manchu story.) Good, solid neo-Pulp, with evil industrialists, lost treasures, and world conquest on the plate. Writers Tze Chun and Mike Weiss work well together, and line artist Dan McDaid has a faint John Romita Jr. influence to his work. Given the sometimes heavy and deliberately crude inking, color artist Daniela Miwa does have to be careful to avoid murk, and she does a good job of using color to set scene and mood without obscuring things or being needlessly garish (some scenes need to be garish, of course). Recommended. \$19.99 trade paperback or \$29.99 floppies box set, available direct from TKO at [tkopresents.com](http://tkopresents.com) (with half of that going to a comic shop of your choice for the duration of the promotion).

Sentient: TKO - Normally I'm not too keen on bleak future SF, and this is pretty bleak. Earth is less than a generation away from becoming unlivable, and while FTL ships are carrying people to a colony on another world, only a tiny handful can be saved...and humanity is fighting over the new world too, so it may be doomed before it starts. For plot device reasons tied to how the FTL works, ships spend a big chunk of the time incommunicado, and the story starts just as that blackout zone is about to be entered. (Aside: this is one of those stories where the details of space travel are never really addressed, just establishing that it takes a long time to get through the blackout zone and they can't just coast to conserve fuel. It's never said where the colony world is, it's just a contrivance to allow for the premise of a ship AI being responsible for way more than it was programmed to do over the course of many months, while facing dangers both natural and human.) As long as you don't poke at the science or logic behind the plot points too much, they do progress reasonably enough and let Lemire tell the story he wants to tell. And that's ultimately a hopeful story. As horrible as humanity is shown to be, our creations (AI and children, in this case) can still learn to be better. It may be a forlorn hope...every generation at some point gives up on fixing things and hopes the next generation to come along will do better...but hope it still is. And these kids and their AI foster mother make big strides towards overcoming hate and division. Recommended. \$19.99 trade paperback or \$29.99 floppies box set, same deal as Doctor Fang.

Floppies:

No, I don't have any particular disdain for the monthlies, but they \*are\* floppy, yes? (And not all of them come out monthly, or on a regular schedule in general, so I can't just call this section "Monthlies" or even "Periodicals" as that implies a regular period.)

Kid Nefarious One-Shot: Maneki Neko Books - I wasn't expecting to have any floppies this month, but when I ordered the Gladstone set they threw in a copy of this Kickstarted solo story featuring one of the students. It feels like it doesn't quite fit with the main storyline's conceit of kayfabe, and there's a pretty narrow window during volume 1 where it could fit if Kid N's not supposed to know yet. This is written by someone other than the writer of the main series, and drawn by the artist who did vol 2, which does help explain why the feel is off...the series creator may have edited this, but he apparently gave this writer a lot of free rein. Purely as a thing in isolation, it's a pretty good read. It just clashes with the rest of the Gladstone stories I read right before it.

Dave Van Domelen, "YOU HAVE AWOKEN THE COSMIC GOLEM. I HAVE BEEN FORGED BY THE GOLEM MASTERS OF OLD AND CHARGED WITH PROTECTION OF THE COSMIC GAUNTLET. TURN BACK WHILE YOU STILL CAN!" "Bored. Napping." - Gladstone's School for World Conquerors vol 3

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